

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Claxton School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 241 Merrimon Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Asheville

N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC

county Buncombe

code 021

zip code 28801

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

William S. Pringle
Signature of certifying official

4-27-92
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation: concrete

walls: concrete

brick

roof: asphalt

other: concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Claxton School, designed by Ronald Greene and built in 1922--1925, stands on an elevated lot at the northeast corner of Merrimon Avenue and Hillside Street in north Asheville. The angular building embraces the corner lot with its long classroom wings, and the monumental facade dominates the intersection. There are rock walls at the edge of the school yard, and steps at the street corner lead to the building's main entrance.

Claxton is a large, three-story Neo-Classical style building. The relatively narrow central block is roughly keystone-shaped, and the two rectangular classroom wings are canted away from its main facade so that they are parallel to Merrimon Avenue and Hillside Street. These wings were extended two bays in 1925, just one year after the school opened. The original two-story auditorium is in back of the building between the wings. The oddly-shaped wedges created where the auditorium intersects the oblique angles of the main building form windowed light wells. The east wing light well contains a large, square, brick chimney wrapped in steel bands for stabilization.

The school is constructed of hollow clay tile throughout; the major elevations are faced with cast concrete stone veneer to resemble ashlar, while the northeast (rear) elevation has gray brick veneer. At all main elevations, the spare treatment of the first story, featuring plain water table, large "stone" blocks, cleanly-incised windows without ornament, and flat stringcourse above, lends it the appearance of a raised basement. In contrast, the second and third stories feature smaller blocks and Doric pilasters or columns defining each bay. The pilasters support an entablature with unadorned architrave and frieze and a denticulated molded cornice that forms a parapet. The flat roof is of built-up composition on wood trusses and features a copper and glass domed skylight.

The main facade of the central block is three bays wide. The first story has three recessed entrances with replacement metal double doors, wired glass transoms, and narrow, slightly battered surrounds of cast blocks with bezants. A plaque, which provides the school name,

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date of construction, architect, and contemporary school board, is above the central door. Two monumental Doric three-quarter-columns in antis rise from the stringcourse above the first story. The columns separate three sets of tripartite windows on the second and third stories of the building. There are shelf architraves above the second floor windows and paneled aprons below those on the third floor.

The fenestration of the main elevations of the classroom wings echo the treatment of the central block, with single windows at the first story and tripartite windows above. The end elevations of the wings, finished with cast-stone blocks and pairs of monumental pilasters at the corners, have double windows. The rear of the building has tripartite windows for classrooms on all three stories, and single windows which light the stairwells and auditorium. All windows are modern one-over-one double-hung sash with opaque fixed transoms.

In addition to the main entrance, the ends of the wings (the north and east elevations) have exterior single doors on each story and fire escapes. The three-story stairwells in the wings, located two bays from the ends of the wings, have exterior double doors in the rear on the first story. The auditorium ell has single doors on each side.

The main entrance leads through a small lobby into an area originally designed as an open three-story, oval rotunda which would pull smoke up and out in case of fire. Architect Ronald Greene's design featured mezzanines on the second and third floors to allow light from the skylight to penetrate all three floors. However, the city insurance commissioner rejected this design for other safety reasons, and the rotunda was closed off on each floor. On the third floor, the rotunda ceiling features an elliptical multi-pane skylight. A stairwell to the second floor is directly to the right of the lobby. Gracefully shaped, heavy modillions create an archway between the rotunda and the classroom wings. This detail is repeated on the upper floors.

The entrance to the auditorium is directly opposite the main entrance. The auditorium, which was converted to a media center in 1985 by Asheville architect Danie Johnson, has been partitioned, and stairs have been built from the second-floor balcony down to the main floor. Although the auditorium seats and stage floor were removed, the proscenium arch and the small arched doorways on each side remain intact.

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The walls of the classroom wing corridors are punctuated by pilasters and room doors. Each corridor has a wall cabinet containing a fire hose. Corridor floors are concrete, and the walls are plaster. Three-story stairwells are located at the ends of the original classroom wings. Transoms mark the area where the 1925 additions join the original building. Most of the classrooms measure 21 feet x 36 feet and have the original doors with their six-light windows. Floors are wooden, and some have been carpeted. The rooms receive generous natural light from the large windows spanning their entire outer walls. Each classroom has a cloak room, and some have sinks and water closets which were added when the building was renovated about 1960. The original cafeteria, located on the first floor, was converted to a classroom in 1968 when the new cafeteria addition was completed. In addition to classrooms, each floor has restrooms and storage rooms. Teachers' lounges are on the first and third floors. The library, originally on the third floor, has been converted to a classroom.

Additions to the original building include the twelve classrooms added to the ends of the wings in 1925. Six new rooms were placed symmetrically on the end of each wing, matching original construction. School board minutes show that architect C. Gadsden Sayre of Greensboro was paid for work on this addition. Later additions include the new cafeteria (1968, Asheville architect T. Edmund Whitmire) and the gymnasium (1985, architect Danie Johnson). These one-story additions, on the ends of the north wing and east wing, respectively, are off-set from the main building by small corridors which lessen their impact. There is also a small, one-story room which was added to the back of the auditorium in 1985. A covered walkway (1985, Danie Johnson) has been built in the bus-loading area, at the end of the east wing. In 1990, all windows were replaced, in keeping with city school maintenance policy. The original classroom windows were six-over-nine on the first and second floors, and six-over-six on the third floor, all with transoms with sheaf-of-wheat muntin patterns. The tripartite casement windows on the main entrance bay also had the sheaf-of-wheat design. Some original windows are in possession of local residents.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

Period of Significance

1922-1941

Significant Dates

1922, 1925

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Greene, Ronald - Architect

Sayre, C. Gadsden - Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Due to the rapid population growth in Asheville in the 1920s, the city school system found that it needed to alleviate overcrowded conditions, especially in the north Asheville area. Plans for a new north Asheville school began in 1922 when architect Ronald Greene was selected to design a new school at the corner of Merrimon Avenue and Hillside Street. Completed in 1924, the new school was named Claxton in honor of Dr. Philander P. Claxton, Asheville's first school superintendent. Today, Claxton is an active elementary school and holds the distinction of being Asheville's oldest surviving city school. It is significant architecturally as a fine Neo-Classical style building designed by a renowned architect. It exhibits all of the salient features of the 1920s urban North Carolina elementary school. Claxton is also significant in the history of education in this area as it reflects a response to both population growth and education philosophies of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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Buncombe Co., NCEducation Context and Historical Background

North Carolina's nineteenth-century public school system is often described as one of the nation's worst. Attendance was poor, facilities were small and inadequate, and local support varied greatly from county to county and city to city. Governor Charles B. Aycock's education improvements were welcomed as the twentieth century began. Under his leadership North Carolina saw significant improvements in education: local education taxes, consolidation of rural schools, construction of new schools, longer school years, and increased teachers' salaries. During the entire first quarter of the twentieth century, North Carolina continued following Aycock's example to improve education. Local and state taxes were collected for education, the school term continued to be lengthened, and schools continued to be built with more centralized guidance (Crabtree, pp. 113-121). While many of these improvements were directed at rural schools, urban schools benefitted as well.

Asheville, for example, had no public school system prior to the late 1880s. By 1887, Asheville was experiencing rapid industrial and commercial growth. The railroad had come in 1880, and as a result more people were moving to Asheville. Tourism, tobacco, industry, and natural resources helped bring prosperity to the area. The rising population created demand for a public school system, and on September 2, 1887, Dr. Philander Priestley Claxton was elected superintendent of the new school system in Asheville (Brown, pp. 6, 24). The Asheville City Schools earned the reputation of "best in the state" under Dr. Claxton (Asheville Times, April 10, 1967). The school system began with only two school buildings. The school population was increasing in the 1890s and early 1900s, and at least twelve new schools were opened during that period (Brown, pp. 42-48).

The 1920s real estate boom in Asheville placed tremendous strain on the crowded school system. Due to lack of space, forty-five per cent of the students could attend only part-time (Minutes, Book 8, pp. 66, 67). Two particularly crowded schools were Orange Street School and Montford Avenue School (formerly Academy Street School), both of which served north Asheville. A major factor in the growth of north Asheville was the Grove Park neighborhood, developed in three phases: 1908, 1914, and 1923 by Edwin Wiley Grove. The neighborhood reflects a nationwide trend of middle and upper-class homeowners leaving the city core for the suburbs (Grove Park Historic District National Register Nomination, 1988).

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In keeping with the statewide trend of public school improvements, a bond issue was passed in 1921 to fund construction of four new schools in Asheville including a new school for north Asheville. In a letter to the city commissioners, Superintendent Brooker stated that "the new buildings should be planned as to permit future additions without spoiling the architectural symmetry of the plans," in order to accommodate both present and future needs (Minutes, Book 8, p. 81). Other architectural considerations were passed on as state guidelines for educational needs (State Historic Preservation Office, p.12). Substantial building materials, efficient use of space for educational purposes as well as auditoriums which could be shared by the community, use of an architect's design, long corridors, and enough stylishness to evoke community pride were among their suggestions that evolved throughout the twenties.

The new north Asheville school followed the tradition of substantial, architect-designed public schools which had been established in Asheville earlier in the twentieth century: Orange Street School, Queen Carson High School, Montford Avenue School, Asheville High School, Stephens-Lee High School (all of these have been demolished). It was designed by architect Ronald Greene as a substantial masonry building executed in the Neo-Classical style.

On April 26, 1923, the City Council of the Parent-Teacher Association requested that the new north Asheville school be named Claxton in honor of Dr. Philander P. Claxton, first superintendent of Asheville City Schools (see note on next page). The school board approved this name on May 26, 1923 (Minutes, Book 15, p. 61).

Claxton School finally opened on January 24, 1924 and housed grades one through seven. The new school filled to capacity immediately, and once again crowded conditions mandated part-time classes in many schools, including Claxton. On December 6, 1924, a bond issue passed for additions to Claxton and other Asheville schools. In 1925, twelve new classrooms were added onto Claxton, placed symmetrically on the end of each wing, with the new construction matching the original building (Brown, p. 62; Johnson, Structural Report). School board minutes show that architect C. Gadsden Sayre made the classroom additions. General contractor was Glasskill Construction Company (Minutes, Book 2, p. 9).

Claxton continues to serve as an elementary school for kindergarten through fifth grade. Claxton owes its fine state of preservation to its 67 years of careful maintenance and continued

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use as a school. As the Asheville City Schools convert to an elementary magnet school program, Claxton will feature an arts and humanities theme.

Annotation on the namesake: Dr. Claxton is remembered as a "foremost educator, a philosopher, and a statesman who contributed much to public education in the United States" (Claxton School file, Asheville City Schools, unpublished). He was known as an advocate for kindergartens, compulsory education, free public schools, career training, arts and physical education. He was an early opponent of corporal punishment of school children (Asheville Citizen-Times, July 20, 1975). Claxton graduated from the University of Tennessee and did graduate work at Johns Hopkins and in Europe before coming to Asheville in 1887 (Brown, p. 26). He was only 25 when he became superintendent of the Asheville City Schools and served as such until June 1893, when he resigned to accept a professorship at North Carolina State Normal and Industrial College, now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Plemmons, p. 74). In 1911, President Taft appointed him United States Commissioner of Education, which he served until 1921. Dr. Claxton revisited Asheville in 1937 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the city schools (Asheville Citizen-Times, April 25, 1937) and again in 1953 (Asheville Times, April 10, 1967), and during both visits, he appeared at Claxton School. He died in 1957 at the age of 94 (Claxton School file, Asheville City Schools Administrative Offices).

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Architectural Context

Claxton School is significant architecturally for two reasons: as an exemplar of school architecture of the first quarter of the twentieth century; and as the work of a renowned architect, Ronald Greene. Claxton is a good example the school architecture which embodies the standards which would become prevalent later in the 1920s: use of substantial building materials, architect-designed with Neo-Classical elements, efficient use of space and classroom layout, presence of an auditorium, and prominent siting in the community. Claxton was designed in keeping with the sophisticated schools which had been built in Asheville during the early years of the twentieth century. Perhaps because the construction of the Biltmore House brought experienced architects and artisans to this mountain city, Asheville had a tradition of substantial, architecturally significant urban schools. Among them were the Orange Street School, Queen Carson School, Asheville High School, Stephens-Lee High School, and Montford Avenue School. These have all been demolished, but plans for many of them survive in the Pack Library archives.

Ronald Greene, a prominent architect in Asheville, was selected by the school board to design the proposed north Asheville school (Minutes, Book 1, p. 30), and the contract for general construction was awarded to Z. V. Creasman & Company of Asheville on May 18, 1922 (Brown, p. 60). Greene had received his architectural training from the Pratt School of Architecture, Columbia University, and the Beaux Arts Atelier in Cleveland, Ohio. He had been saturated in the academic twist that American architecture had taken since just before the turn-of-the-century. Popularized by the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, the Classical Revival became a favored style for schools, banks, and other public buildings (McAlester, pp. 344 and 346). Greene was fluent in numerous architectural styles, but chose the very stable and monumental Classical Revival style for this new Asheville school. The temple-like school perhaps possessed more architectural finesse than was typical of urban schools of the 1920s (Little, 3R's).

While Greene's Claxton design embodied so many of the elements that were to become standards for all school construction, one element was questioned. The controversy arose over Greene's design because it was indeed the first school in the state designed for fire protection. Stairwells were separate

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and fireproof, and exterior steel fire stairs were provided. Because smoke was the primary killer in public buildings, Greene had designed an open rotunda to pull smoke out through a central point (N.R. Greene, letter). The insurance commissioner believed that this open rotunda was a fire safety hazard and required that the rotunda be closed off on each floor for fire safety. (Minutes, Book 1, p. 134).

Ronald Greene was a Michigan native who had worked briefly in Asheville in the teens and then returned in 1920 to establish his architectural practice. He added greatly to Asheville's architectural fabric: the Jackson Building, a 1924 downtown landmark; the Westall Building, 1925; the Municipal Building, 1925-26; Stephens-Lee High School, 1921 (razed 1975); Lonchamps Apartments, 1925; and numerous residences. Greene continued his architectural career in Gastonia from 1951 until his death there in 1961 (Asheville Citizen, October 12, 1961).

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Asheville City Schools Administrative Office

10. Geographical Data

Area of property 4.3

UTM References

A

1	7
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3	9	4	1	3	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Claxton School property is shown outlined in bold on the accompanying tax map: Map no. 10, Ward 2, parcel no. 159.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary shown is that of all the Claxton School property. This includes all of the property historically associated with Claxton School.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martha Fullington Historical research by Andrea Austin
 organization Archives and History, Western Office date November 26, 1991
 street & number 3601 Sweeten Creek Road telephone 704-684-1342
 city or town Arden state NC zip code 28704

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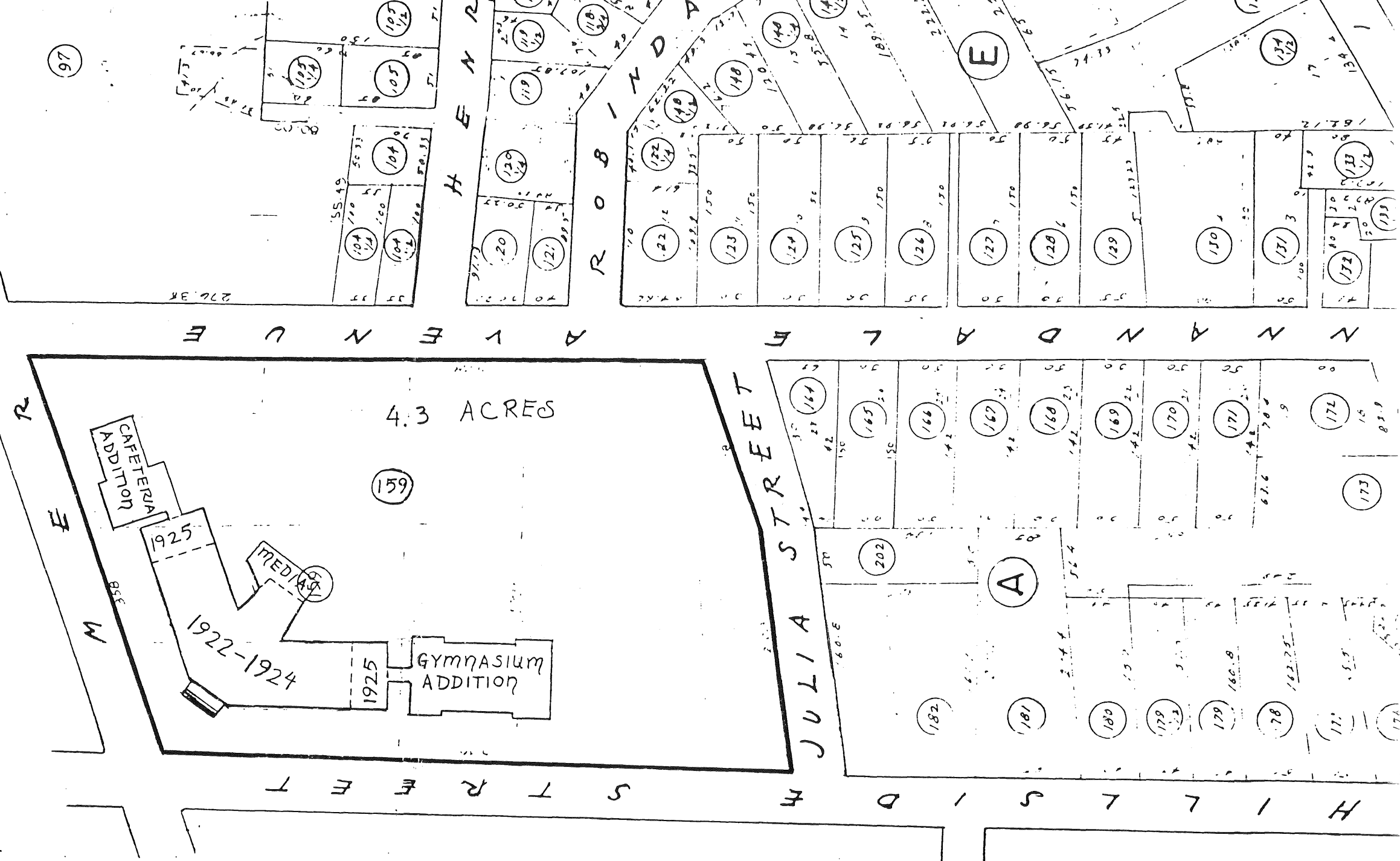
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5



CLAXTON SCHOOL

241 Merrimon Avenue
Asheville

Buncombe County Tax Map No. 10, Ward 2

Scale: 1" = 100'

This is a portion of the complete tax map.

